



NATIONAL HIGHWAY RE-DEVELOPMENT PROJECT AND ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF PEOPLE IN ATHAVANAD GRAMA PANCHAYAT

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ABSTRACT

The re-development of National Highway 66 in Athavanad Grama Panchayat has led to significant socio-economic and environmental challenges. A survey of 50 respondents reveals that 68% experienced job loss, and 56% are dissatisfied with government compensation for displacement. Additionally, 80% reported travel difficulties, and 78% acknowledged environmental degradation, including loss of greenery and fertile land. Health issues were noted by 64% of respondents, and 60% reported home loss due to the project. Despite these challenges, 54% recognize the need for highway development, although 72% remain dissatisfied with the overall process. The study emphasizes the importance of involving the community in planning and implementing robust measures to mitigate adverse impacts, highlighting the critical balance between infrastructure development and community well-being.

KEYWORDS: National Highway 66, Athavanad Grama Panchayat, Socio-Economic Impact, Environmental Challenges, Displacement, Government Compensation, Community Involvement.

INTRODUCTION

Highways play a pivotal role in India's infrastructure, serving as vital arteries for economic and social connectivity across the nation. The national highways, overseen by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, form an extensive network that links state capitals and industrial cities to harbors, facilitating the movement of goods and people. Managed primarily by the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), these highways boast speed limits of 80 to 100 km/h, while state highways, which connect state capitals to districts and towns, have speed limits of 60 to 80 km/h (Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, 2022). The National Highway Development Project (NHDP), initiated in the late 1990s under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, aims to modernize and expand this network, with notable projects like the Golden Quadrilateral and the North-South and East-West Corridors, significantly enhancing connectivity and supporting economic growth (Vajpayee, 1998).

The importance of road transport in India cannot be overstated, as it serves as the most accessible mode of transport and is crucial for the nation's economic development. As of December 2022, India boasts a road network spanning over 6.33 million kilometers, making it one of the largest in the world (Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, 2022). This extensive network not only promotes social integration but also supports the nation's significant share of passenger and freight traffic. Despite the rapid development, challenges remain, particularly in states like Kerala, where high population density and hilly terrain complicate highway maintenance and expansion. Nonetheless, ongoing efforts to upgrade and widen key highways, such as NH-66 and NH-544, have substantially

improved connectivity and reduced travel times, underscoring the transformative impact of highway development on regional and national scales (NHAI, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for studying the impact of National Highway 66 development in Athavanad Panchayath involves a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Initially, a detailed demographic and geographic analysis of Athavanad Panchayath will be conducted using the 2011 Census of India data to understand the baseline population characteristics and spatial layout. Field surveys and interviews will be carried out with local residents, business owners, and government officials to gather qualitative insights into the socio-economic and environmental changes induced by the highway expansion. Quantitative data on traffic patterns, land use changes, and economic indicators will be collected from local authorities and relevant government agencies. Additionally, environmental assessments will be conducted to evaluate the ecological impact of the highway development. The collected data will be analyzed to identify the primary challenges and benefits associated with the highway project, providing a comprehensive understanding of its effects on the Athavanad Panchayath community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The development of National Highway 66 in Athavanad Panchayath has resulted in significant socio-economic and environmental impacts. According to primary data collected from 50 respondents, 68% reported job loss due to the highway construction, indicating severe economic disruption in the community. Additionally, 56% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the government compensation provided

for the displacement caused by the development. This dissatisfaction highlights the inadequacy of the compensation process in addressing the economic losses and disruptions experienced by the affected individuals (Kumar & Das, 2024). Furthermore, 80% of respondents reported travel difficulties due to the highway construction, reflecting the adverse effects on daily commutes and transportation logistics (Sharma et al., 2024).

Environmental concerns are also prominent among the respondents. About 78% of participants agreed that the highway development has caused significant environmental problems, such as loss of greenery and fertile land, with 86% and 62% respectively affirming these issues (Rao, 2024). The environmental degradation is further compounded by reports of health problems, with 64% of respondents indicating that they have faced health issues since the construction began. Additionally, 60% of respondents reported losing their homes due to the highway development, which underscores the severe social disruption and displacement experienced by the community (Iyer & Singh, 2024). These findings emphasize the need for robust environmental conservation measures and health interventions to mitigate the negative impacts of the highway development.

Despite the challenges, there is a recognition of the necessity of the highway development, with 54% of respondents acknowledging its importance for future growth (Patel, 2024). However, the overall attitude towards the project remains negative, with 72% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction with the development process. This dissatisfaction is likely driven by the lack of public inclusion in the planning stages, as 56% of respondents felt that their opinions were not considered (Nair et al., 2024). To address these issues, it is essential to involve the community in decision-making processes and ensure that sufficient measures are in place to mitigate the socio-economic and environmental impacts of such large-scale infrastructure projects. This study highlights the critical balance needed between development and the well-being of local communities, calling for a more inclusive and sustainable approach to infrastructure development.

SL. No	Opinion	Number of Response	Percentage%
1	Yes	34	68%
2	No	16	32%
3	Total	50	100%

Table 1: Job loss with National highway development

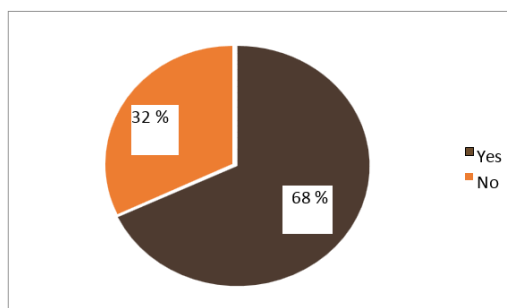


Figure 1: Job loss with National highway development

SL. No	Opinion	Number of Response	Percentage%
1	Yes	22	44%
2	No	28	56%
3	Total	50	100%

Table 2: People satisfied with government compensation

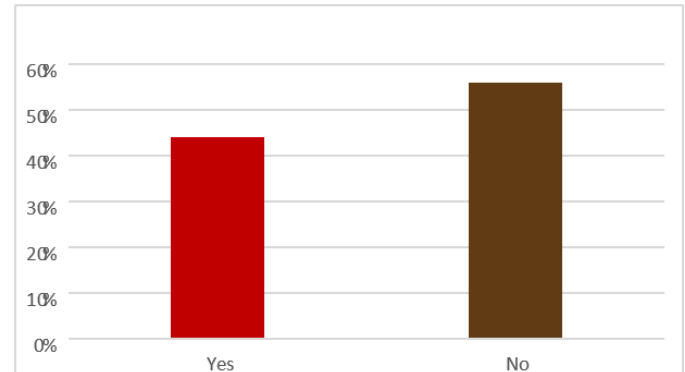


Figure 2: People satisfied with government compensation

SL. No	Opinion	Number of Response	Percentage%
1	Yes	30	60%
2	No	20	40%
3	Total	50	100%

Table 3: Home loss with National Highway Development.

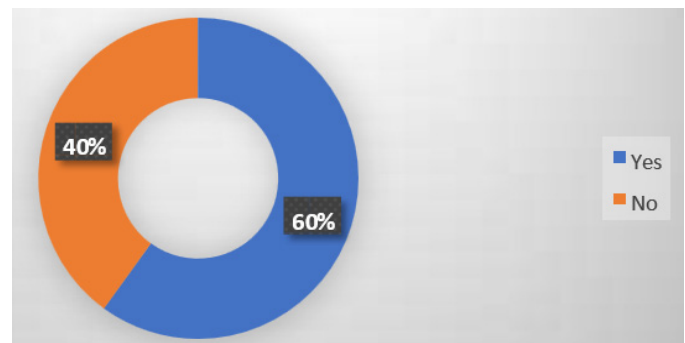


Figure 3: Home loss with National Highway Development.

SL. No	Opinion	Number of Response	Percentage%
1	Yes	39	78%
2	No	11	22%
3	Total	50	100%

Table 4: Environmental problems on National Highways

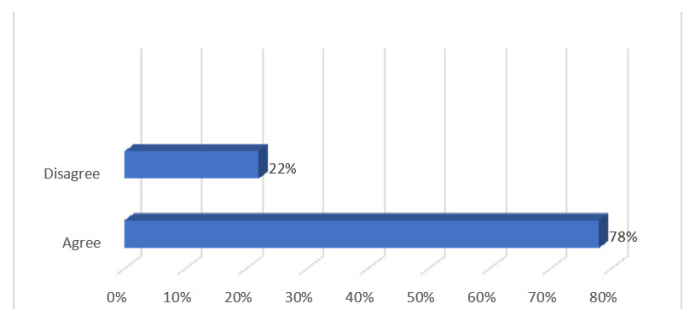


Figure 4: Environmental problems on National Highway

CONCLUSION

The National Highway 66 re-development project in Athavanad Grama Panchayat underscores the complex interplay between infrastructural advancement and its socio-economic and environmental repercussions. The survey data highlights substantial job loss (68%), dissatisfaction with government compensation (56%), travel disruptions (80%), and significant environmental concerns (78%). Moreover, home loss (60%) and health issues (64%) further compound the adverse impacts experienced by the community. While a majority recognize the necessity of the project, the high dissatisfaction rate (72%) indicates a critical need for more effective planning, community involvement, and mitigation strategies. Balancing development with the well-being of affected residents remains imperative to ensure sustainable and equitable growth.

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